



February 24, 2023

The Honorable Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
The Honorable Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair
House Committee on Finance

Dear Chairman Yamashita,

On behalf of National Taxpayers Union (NTU), we write to offer our opposition to legislative proposal HB551. While we acknowledge the well-meaning legislative intent and the importance of reducing nicotine addiction and improving overall health, Hawaiians will not be well served should this provision become law. Before proceeding with final deliberations, NTU urges you to bear in mind the following observations from a health and regulatory policy perspective.

Innovative products and market-driven solutions have led to fewer Americans smoking and more quitting than ever before. These alternative products are not completely risk free, but they significantly reduce the harm incurred by traditional cigarettes. Smoke-free products do not burn tobacco, therefore, they emit lower levels of harmful chemicals compared to cigarettes. Electronic smoking devices do not produce tar or carbon monoxide, two of the most harmful elements in tobacco smoke. Blanket flavor bans have the potential to upend the recent gains made over the past few years and push those addicted to nicotine back to using far more dangerous products.

Providing consumers with safe choices and increasing public awareness of the dangers associated with the risks of various products will lead to more effective results than legislative bans. Lawmakers should avoid policies that will affect millions of adults who rely on the availability of these products as a way to improve their overall health. We request that members of this committee focus their time and resources on embracing any and all alternatives that reduce smoking dependency.

To achieve the goal of a smoke-free future, state government must listen to the scientific community and recognize the important role these products play in improving the health and wellness of Hawaiians. HB551 blatantly ignores scientific research which suggests most of the health consequences of smoking cigarettes is directly correlated to the carcinogens emitted from combustible products.

Section 1 of this proposal states, “tobacco use is a serious public health problem in terms of human suffering and loss of life,” yet the Hawaiian legislature is considering enacting a law that is undeniably counterintuitive to the author's intention. Lawmakers should bear this

consideration in mind in order to avoid missteps that create unintended consequences. NTU shares the goal of tobacco reduction with lawmakers and recognizes the health challenges faced by taxpayers. To the extent public officials wish to examine policy responses that will positively impact our common objective of decreasing tobacco use, many free-market, pro-taxpayer options exist.

We hope you stand with the residents of Hawaii and oppose HB551. Thank you for your time and consideration of NTU's comments, please reach out should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

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